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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Written statement submitted by the International Federation of Human Rights, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is distributed in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[29 January 1993]

Massive and systematic violations of human rights in Rwanda: report of an international mission of inquiry

1. A mother and daughter mortally wounded by a machete attack in Nyamyumba, a family of three decapitated in Kayove, another 10 people killed as they were fleeing from the commune of Ramba to the commune of Rutsiro, a woman dragged out of a bus, killed in front of the other passengers and then buried on the spot - these are some of the latest victims of violence in the communes of Rwanda. As of today, Friday, 19 January 1993, the most recent figures from reliable sources refer to at least 290 dead in 8 of the 30 communes currently affected. Of these, 262 people were killed in 2 communes in the prefecture of Gisenyi: 78 in Ramba and 180 in Satinsyi. In addition, some 1,500 persons have left their homes and taken refuge in parish churches or have fled from their commune or prefecture.

2. The disturbances began in Gisenyi on 22 and 23 January and spread to the prefectures of Ruhengeri and Byumba. The most recent reports speak of a further extension, particularly to Kibungo, Cyangugu, Kibuye and even to the prefecture of Kigali, especially the commune of Gikoro. It is feared that the disturbances and massacres will become nation-wide.

3. This resurgence of violence comes after a two-week visit by an international commission of inquiry on Human Rights violations in Rwanda. It seems to bear out the threats made by certain government and local authorities, during the commission's visit, of a resumption of massacres of members of the minority Tutsi ethnic group following the commission's departure. The commission left Rwanda on 21 January and the violence resumed on the following day.

4. The international commission was formed at the request of Rwandese associations for the defence of human rights to investigate the massacres of Tutsis, terrorism and the assassination of members of certain political parties, as well as other human rights violations. In a communique issued in Brussels on 22 January, the commission presented its preliminary conclusions, which already establish that acts of genocide and war crimes were committed from the outset of the war between the Rwandese Government and the Rwandese Patriotic Front (FPR) on 1 October 1990. Since then, more than 1,000 Tutsis have been killed and hundreds of thousands of people have had to flee their homes, some of which have been burned down. There has been looting of property in such communes as Kibilara, Kinigi, Mukingo, Mutura, Kanzenze and Giciye.

5. In Kinigi, the commission's excavations disclosed more than a dozen victims of summary executions whose bodies had been concealed in a pit on the property of the leading commune official, the burgomaster. In the commune of Mutura, the commission discovered a grave containing a dozen tangled bodies of civilians. These finds confirm the allegations of massacres in various regions of the country, as well as the accuracy of reports that there are large numbers of such common graves.

6. The commission was able to observe the expansion of armed groups or militias organized by political parties. The groups or militias organized by the MRND, which has ruled the country as the sole party for 19 years, and those of its ally, the Coalition for the Defence of the Republic (CDR), are particularly active. During its mission, the commission itself was stopped at a totally illegal barrier erected by armed MRND militiamen. During this incident, the Rwandese interpreter accompanying the commission was threatened with death for belonging to the Tutsi ethnic group. The commission is very worried about the fate of certain witnesses and interpreters who are now in danger because they cooperated with it. The father of one witness died during the commission's visit after a mob attacked his family because it objected to the assistance which his son had given the commission. The first reports spoke of suicide, but the judicial authorities are not ruling out murder. A number of other persons associated with the commission's work were threatened with death, including someone who was threatened in the presence of certain members of the commission when they were boarding their aeroplane to leave Rwanda. In the parish of Nyamata, where the commission went to gather

testimony, some witnesses were photographed by an agent of the central intelligence services.

7. In a letter addressed to President Habyarimana on 16 January, the commission formally protested against the acts of violence committed by militiamen from his party and against the threats received by persons who had cooperated in its work. In a meeting of 21 January, it called upon the President, and also the Minister of the Interior, to guarantee the protection of persons who had testified to it and cooperated with it. However, the President turned down a request by the commission to make a national broadcast requesting the population to respect such persons.

8. The commission also noted that both the Rwandese army and the army of the Rwandese Patriotic Front have committed war crimes, as defined in the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols thereto. It gathered evidence of summary executions, rape and looting.

9. After examining the case files in the Government Procurator's Offices of three prefectures, the commission also noted serious shortcomings in the judicial system which led to those responsible for the violence being given an assurance of immunity from prosecution. Hundreds of persons provisionally imprisoned for admitting and sometimes even describing in detail, crimes committed against members of the Tutsi ethnic group or political opponents have been released for no reason, and are thus able to go back home and engage in further threats and abuses.

10. The commission also draws the attention of international public opinion to the camps of displaced persons which it visited in various parts of the prefecture of Byumba. Some 350,000 persons are housed in these camps, while thousand of others have found refuge with their families or with friends in the southern part of the country. These displaced persons depend on food supplies from the International Red Cross which have occasionally been interrupted in recent weeks by the FPR's refusal to allow convoys to pass along one of the main access roads to Rwanda. During the last few days, some convoys have been stuck in Kigali because of the roadblocks set up by armed MRND and CDR militiamen.

11. Lastly, the Commission received a mass of testimony concerning the daily abuses committed by members of the Rwandese army in the form of thefts, arbitrary requistioning and looting. According to the reports it received, rape is widespread, particularly at army roadblocks.

12. The international commission, coordinated by representatives of the International Federation of Human Rights and Africa Watch (New York), also comprised representatives of the Union interafricaine des droits de l'homme and the Centre international pour la promotion des droits de la personne et du développement démocratique (Montreal). The 10 jurists and human rights specialists were of Belgian, Burkina Faso, Canadian, French, Netherlands, Ivorian, Swiss and United States nationality.

The mission will publish its full report by the end of February 1993.